



News from

Congressman Ron Kind

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S THIRD
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1406 Longworth House Office Building • Washington, D.C. 20515 • (202) 225-5506

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Contact: Stephanie Lundberg
Phone: 202-225-5506

Kind Introduces Legislation to Aid Hearing Impaired; Expands Closed Captioning & Realtime Services *Backing of House Republican Leadership Increases Chance for Passage*

Washington, DC – Yesterday, U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI) made significant headway with his legislation to improve communication services to hearing impaired citizens by providing training grants for realtime writers. Kind, a member of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, was joined by the committee Chairman, Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), in offering the legislation as a bipartisan amendment to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The amendment passed in the Education and the Workforce 21st Century Subcommittee. The full bill is expected to be brought to the House floor for a vote later this spring.

“We have a responsibility to see to it that all Americans have the opportunity to be active participants in society, and that includes making public media equally accessible to everyone,” stated Kind. “Realtime writers are a critical link in bringing mainstream communications to hearing impaired individuals, and right now there is a shortage of qualified people to do that. At a time when the media may offer the only opportunity to follow progress in Iraq, track loved ones abroad, and receive vital updates about terrorist threats at home, it is not right for so many of our citizens to be without access to such important information due to a lack of captioning services.”

Kind’s legislation would provide training grants for real-time writers to meet closed captioning requirements under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which mandated that all television programming be fully captioned by 2006 to standardize the availability of mainstream media to hearing impaired Americans. Schools, however, are training only half as many real-time writers as needed to provide the required services, leaving thousands of hours of programming unavailable to closed captioning audiences and limiting its availability for other purposes.

Past President and current Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Wisconsin Court Reporters Association Ed Johnson noted the various arenas of life that realtime writers can help hearing impaired audiences “The services provided by realtime writers through closed captioning and CART [Computer Assisted Realtime Translation] translates into so many benefits for the hearing impaired: in the classroom, in houses of worship, and in live entertainment venues, and the list goes on. However, there is a shortage of people who can provide this service, and Congressman Kind’s legislation is a great opportunity to help train people that perform this valuable skill.”

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The potential audience for captioned television is estimated at nearly 100 million. In addition to the more than 25 million hearing impaired Americans who rely on captioning services, research has found that many more people stand to benefit from watching captioning television, including the nearly 30 million Americans learning English as a second language, 27 million illiterate adults, 12 million young children learning to read, and 3.7 million remedial readers.